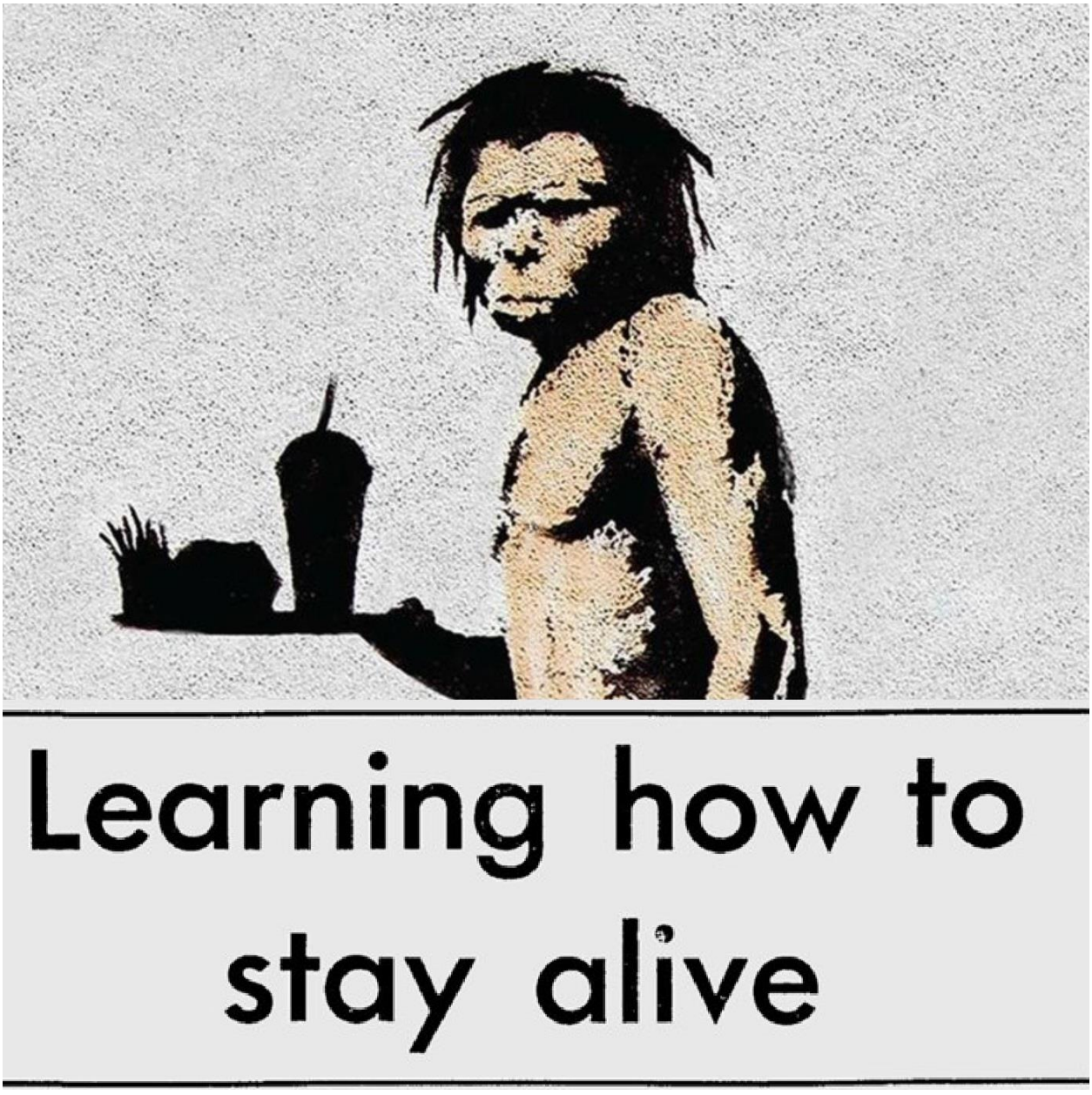
Getting Birchbark Fit: A Three Month Program



Do you know how to stay alive? Now that I have your attention, let's talk about getting into shape. Adventuring in the

wilderness puts demands on your cardio-respiratory system. Additionally, canoeing and portaging puts stress on your shoulder joints -- shoulder injuries are one of the top five injuries for paddlers. In a three part series, published in Field & Stream in May, June and July 2014, author Michael R. Shea explained a three phase program developed by Under Armour pro staffer Cameron Hanes to become fit for the outdoors. I have adapted his program to get you from zero to Birchbark Fit in three months.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO CHECK WITH YOUR PHYSICIAN BEFORE STARTING ANY PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM.

Getting Paleo Fit: Month 1

Now is the time to start training, month one, which emphasizes cardio, strength, and flexibility drills, starts today.

1. Slow and Steady...Weeks 1-2

Take things slow in the beginning. "Most people never make it outside because they think they need to run a marathon", Hanes says. Walk—don't run—for 30 minutes every day. Try to maintain a brisk pace, but don't push it. "It takes a while to break in your legs".

Weeks 3-4

Divide your walks into intervals, starting with one minute of light jogging, followed by five minutes of walking. Increase the times of your runs with the goal of jogging the entire 30-minute session by the end of the month.

2. Strong Like Bull...Weeks 1-2

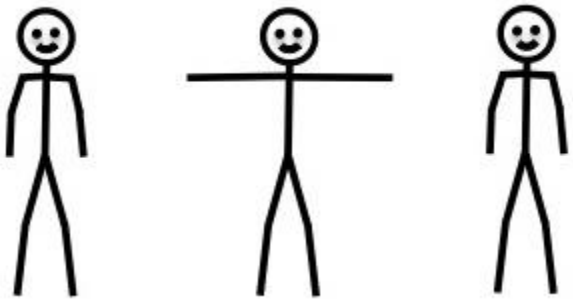
For strength, start with three sets of planks: Hold an elevated push-up position for 20 seconds. After a rest, get up on one arm and hold the plank for 20 seconds. Switch arms and repeat. Next, do four sets of 10 push-ups and 10 squats.

Weeks 3-4

Lengthen your plank times by 10 seconds until you can hold it for a full minute. And add more push-ups and squats. By the end of the month, you should be able to do 80 of each, over four sets, every day for an entire week.

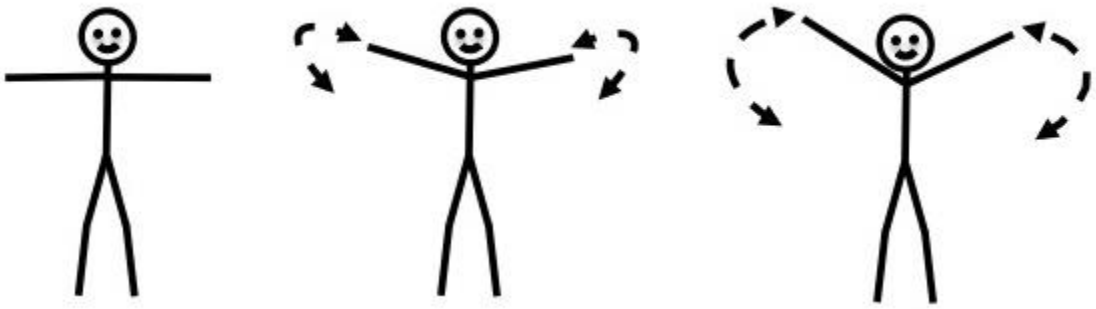
3. Joint Health...Weeks 1-4

NOTE -- These exercises are written for someone who is already reasonably strong. If you find that you are unable to complete all the repetitions, work up to it.

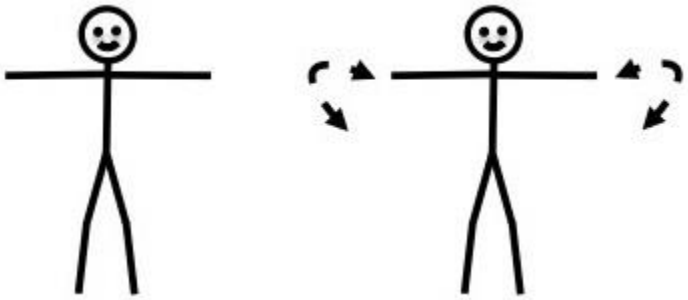


Arm Raises: Stand up straight with your arms by your sides and with your feet shoulder width apart. Position your hands flat with your palms resting against your sides. Now raise your arms straight out sideways until they are shoulder height with your

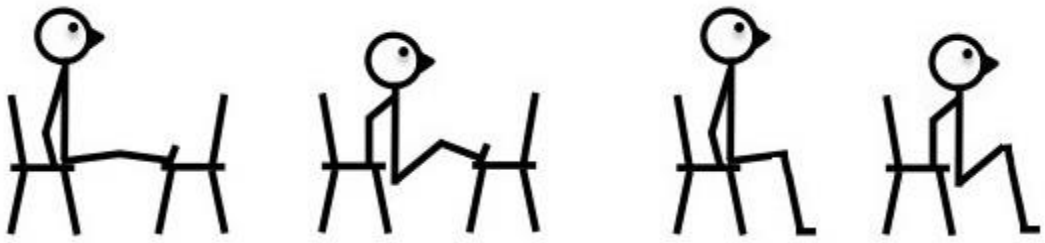
palms facing downwards. Hold this position for a count of fifteen seconds and then lower your arms to your sides. Repeat this 10 times.



Arm Circles: Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart. Next raise your arms until they are horizontal at shoulder height, with your palms facing downwards. While keeping your arms straight move your hands in small circles about one foot in diameter, completing 10 circles. Next, repeat this exercise in the opposite direction, completing 10 circles. Lower your arms and rest. Raise your arms to the horizontal again and complete 10 large circles of about two feet in diameter. Next, repeat this exercise in the opposite direction, completing 10 circles.

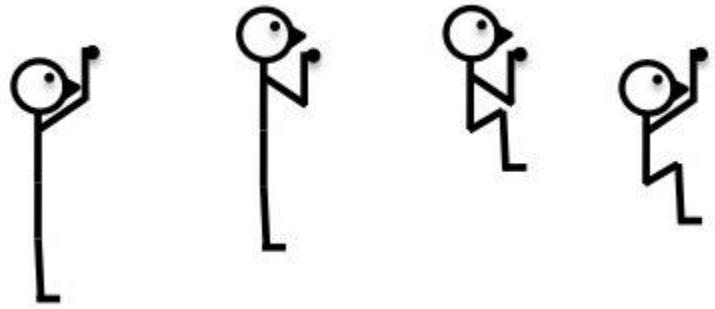


Arm Rotation: Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart. Raise your arms until they are horizontal at shoulder height, with your palms facing upwards. Swing your arms together in front of you, keeping them horizontal while rotating your hands so that your palms are facing downwards. Hold this position for a count of fifteen seconds and then reverse the movement back to the starting position and hold for fifteen seconds. Repeat this exercise 10 times.



Chair Dips: Place two chairs facing each other about 3 feet apart. Sit on one chair and place your feet on the other. Grip the edges of the chair you are sitting on, on either side of your hips. Slide forward until your arms and feet are supporting you on opposite chairs, slowly lower yourself until your elbow is close to but less than ninety degrees. Hold this position for 5 seconds and raise yourself back up to the chair seat. Repeat this exercise 10 times.

Do this exercise every other day. If you are unable to complete one repetition of this exercise, you can modify it by using just one chair and keeping your feet on the ground.



Pull-ups: Find a pull-up bar capable of supporting your body mass. It should be at a height, high enough to allow you to grasp it with slightly bent arms. Do not use one that causes you to have straight arms to begin with. Gripping the bar with you palms facing forwards, lift your knees towards your chest and raise yourself up until your chin is level with the bar. Hold this position for the count of 5 seconds and then slowly lower yourself until you have straight arms, keeping your knees tucked throughout. Repeat this exercise 10 times.

Do this exercise every other day. If you are unable to complete one repetition of this exercise, you can modify it by using a lower bar and keeping your feet on the ground.

Getting Birchbark Fit: Month 2

Last month you started with some low-impact exercises. This month, it's all about building endurance, all you need is your pack, a couple of one gallon jugs of water. "*Forget the gym for now*", Cameron Hanes, the Under Armour pro staffer says, "*Just get outside*".

1. Pick Up the Pace...Weeks 5–8

Gradually bump up last month's 30-minute cardio sessions to one hour. Run—don't walk—every other day, increasing the time by 10 minutes until you can go for a full hour.

Load your hunting pack with a gallon jug of water, then find some elevation and "get hiking", Hanes says. When you get to the top of the hill, dump the water to save your knees, on the downhill walk.

Hike every day you don't run, adding more water weights until you hit 4 gallons.

2. Carry Your Weight...Weeks 5–6

Keep up your planks, push-ups, and squats from last month, but add four sets of 20 lunges. To do a proper lunge, keep your upper body straight, then step forward with one leg, lowering your hips until both knees are bent at a 90-degree angle. Alternate legs and do this every other day.

Weeks 7–8

Continue the routine of the past two weeks, but add your pack, loaded with a gallon of water (a gallon is 64 oz, or 1.8 liters, of water and weighs 4 pounds, or 1.8 kgs) in week three, and 2 gallons in week four.

3. Go Long, Joint Health...Weeks 5-6

Keep up your arm raises, arm circles, and arm rotation from last month, doing 10 repetitions each, but do them while holding a 16.9 oz water bottle in each hand (a 16.9 oz, ½ liter, water bottle weighs just over one pound, or ½ a kilogram). Keep up your chair dips and pull-ups but add two more repetitions to your best score from last month.

Weeks 7-8

Keep up your arm raises, arm circles, and arm rotation from weeks 1-2, but add 5 more repetitions to each exercise. Keep up your chair dips and pull-ups but add two more repetitions to your best score from last month.

Getting Birchbark Fit: Month Three

1. Race Into the Season...Weeks 9–10

Just like last month, run an hour every other day, but now shift the focus to speed. Try to knock 30 seconds off your mile pace. If you're comfortable at a nine-minute 30-second clip, for example, work toward nine-minute miles.

Weeks 11–12

Find a 5K or half marathon the weekend before your adventure. It will help you focus your training and increase your drive.

2. Pump It Up...Weeks 9-10

Start workouts with four sets of 10 dumbbell rows by lifting the weight from your knees to your chest while maintaining a squat position. End with the planks, push-ups, squats, and lunges from last month's workout.

Weeks 11-12

Add bench presses and arm curls to the routine. Do four sets of 10 on the flat bench, increasing the weight between sets, then move to the incline and decline bench. Mix in traditional curls with dumbbells.

3. Race Into, Joint Health...Weeks 9-10

Keep up your arm raises, arm circles, and arm rotation from last month, doing 20 repetitions each, but do them while holding a 16.9 oz water bottle in each hand. Keep up your chair dips and pull-ups but add two more repetitions to your best score from last month.

Weeks 11-12

Keep up your arm raises, arm circles, and arm rotation from weeks 1-2, but add 5 more repetitions to each exercise. Keep up your chair dips and pull-ups but add two more repetitions to your best score from last month.

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